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Asia Partnership for Human Development

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EAST TIMOR & SELF-DETERMINATION

"Indonesian troops operating in East Timor have been issued secret instructions that permit torture" announced Amnesty International in a press release of July 20, 1983. The statement continues "An 82 page military manual captured from Indonesian forces by the East Timor resistance movement, FRETILIN, and independently authenticated by Amnesty International, tells soldiers not to photograph prisoners being stripped naked and tortured with electric shocks. The manual is divided into eight sections, seven of which are marked 'secret', including a chapter on interrogation procedures. It says no local witnesses should be present if force is used 'to avoid arousing the antipathy of the people'."

Amnesty International points out that it has received persistent reports of torture, including electric shocks, by Indonesian forces in East Timor since they invaded the territory in December 1975. The organisation has also expressed fears for suspected FRETILIN supporters who have 'disappeared' after detention. Many are believed to have been summarily executed after being tortured under interrogation.

The war in East Timor, according to a recent report by the Center for Defense Information in Washington, is one of the longest running and most violent of the 40 conflicts raging in the world in 1983. "The tragic war in East Timor has resulted in more deaths (100,000-250,000) than any current war except Kampuchea and possibly Afghanistan", asserts the Center.

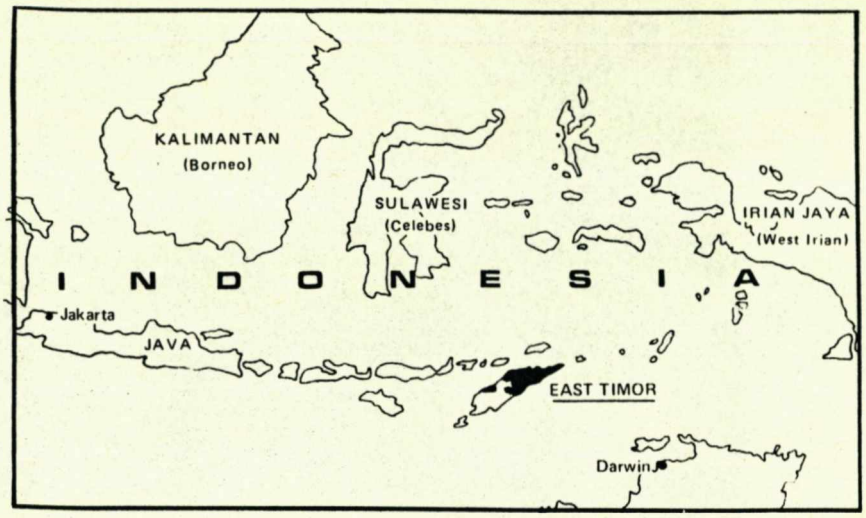
Yet the issue of East Timor is in grave danger of disappearing from the international agenda. In October/November this year, the United Nations will vote either to continue upholding the East Timorese people's right to self-determination or to drop the issue from its agenda, thus effectively recognising Indonesia's forced annexation.

Indonesia, which lost the vote last year by only four votes, is currently lobbying hard and is confident of victory. Concerted efforts are required of governments and organisations sympathetic to East Timor if the UN is to remain faithful to its ideals and its commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms. East Timor is, in particular, a test case of the UN General Assembly's "recognition of the legitimacy of the struggle of the peoples under colonial and alien domination to exercise their right to self-determination and independence by all the necessary means at their disposal".

Background

Portugal's decision, following the coup in 1974, to decolonise its overseas territories, including East Timor, cleared the way for political self-determination by the Timorese for the first time in four centuries.

The two majority parties which emerged, UDT and FRETILIN, favoured independence as opposed to integration with Indonesia, advocated by the small APODETI party. In mid 1975, however, internal problems and pressure from Indonesia led to a short, sharp civil war and the abrupt withdrawal of the Portuguese. This upheaval and the victory over UDT by the more radical FRETILIN party were used by Indonesia as the pretexts for its military invasion in December 1975. Strong opposition by the FRETILIN-led resistance and condemnation by the United Nations failed to dislodge the army of occupation. Indonesia retaliated by claiming that the Timorese had exercised their right to self-determination in mid-1976 when an assembly of selected Timorese petitioned Jakarta to incorporate East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province. Neither the Reagan administration nor the current Australian government recognise the validity of this act. As the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bill Hayden, said during his visit to Jakarta in April this year, "I expressed our deep concern that an internationally supervised act of self-determination has not taken place in East Timor".



The Continuing War

A comparison of current Indonesian census figures of 555,000 with population estimates of 670,000 in 1975 supports the belief that over 100,000 people have died in East Timor since the invasion, though the local Church believes the death-toll has been much higher. Many deaths resulted from starvation due to the disruption of the economy by the war. The International Red Cross described the famine of 1978-79 as being "as bad as Biafra".

Indonesia received $447 million in US military assistance in the years 1972-81. This military aid and its more numerous forces enabled Indonesia to wear down the totally isolated Timorese resistance so that by 1979 FRETILIN's strength had been greatly reduced.

Nevertheless guerrilla attacks and counter-insurgency campaigns continued. In mid 1981 Indonesia launched an all-out offensive — Operation Security — to eliminate FRETILIN. Schools and offices were shut down and crop-growing suspended. Over several months some 50,000 Timorese were sent into the mountains ahead of regular troops to encircle FRETILIN with a 'human fence'. At the same time hundreds of civilian relatives and supporters of FRETILIN were trucked to the coast and moved to the island of Atauro.

This operation was widely condemned. The then head of the Timorese Catholic Church, Mgr. Da Costa Lopes, feared it would precipitate a new famine. And in an unprecedented move, local religious released a passionately worded statement appealing to the international Church "to state openly and officially solidarity with the people of East Timor" and not "to allow us to die deserted". For its part, Jakarta initially denied any such operation was taking place, only to concede later that the offensive had failed militarily and had further alienated ordinary Timorese from Indonesia.

Reliable statistics on the balance of power in 1983 are hard to come by. Jakarta claims FRETILIN numbers have been reduced to about 100 poorly armed guerrillas. FRETILIN for its part claims to have around 6,800 fighters operating in the centre and southern border zones, apart from their stronghold area in the eastern Los Palos zone. Well placed local Church sources claimed in April this year that FRETILIN is organised in ten units, each comprising 120 guerrillas, four units of which are equipped with modern weaponry acquired through Indonesian channels. This would appear a more accurate assessment. Indonesia has grossly understated FRETILIN's capacity for many years and is unlikely to maintain a sizeable garrison, conduct large-scale offensives such as Operation Security, restrict foreign access and continue to seek to destroy FRETILIN's base of support by removing relatives to Atauro were FRETILIN virtually non-existent.

Further doubts have been cast on Indonesia's claims by new pieces of evidence. In March 1983 FRETILIN leaders and the Indonesian military commander in East Timor met for talks which resulted, according to Indonesia, in an offer of amnesty were FRETILIN to surrender, and, according to FRETILIN, in a formal ceasefire based on the reluctance of local Indonesian troops to continue fighting. Whatever the substance of these talks, the fact that they occurred at all is testimony to FRETILIN's existence and the challenge its resistance continues to present. Furthermore, the public warning, issued in August 1983 by General Benny Murdani, the head of the Indonesian armed forces, that Indonesia would launch an all-out offensive against FRETILIN unless they surrendered, is hardly consistent with Indonesia's claims that FRETILIN is a spent force. The set of secret Indonesian army documents, captured by FRETILIN in December 1982 and authenticated by Amnesty International, shows

that the Indonesian army itself is fully aware of FRETILIN's reorganisation since 1979 and the extensive network of support it has been able to establish amongst the people in the towns and villages under Indonesian control. Clearly FRETILIN continues to constitute a challenge to Indonesian hegemony in East Timor and to enjoy an effective measure of popular support.

Development Initiatives

Since 1980, the Indonesian authorities have diversified their strategy in East Timor. On-going military offensives have been accompanied by a range of development initiatives directed at consolidating integration and winning both international support and the hearts and minds of the East Timorese.

Reported expenditure in 1982/83 amounts to $83 million, an increase of 53% over the previous year and up from $3.6 million in 1976/77. Selected foreign visitors have been permitted to make short visits, such as those carried out by members of the US Congress and more recently by the Australian parliament, to observe the resulting material changes. Most have come away singing Indonesia's praises but there has been scant mention of Timorese attitudes or of the rationale and consequences of what is being done.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the 'Indonesianisation' of the young through the provision of schools. 366 schools provide basic education for some 82,000 Timorese children in Indonesian

Interview with a religious superior, August 1982

"At this point, certain areas are critically short of food. Others are in short supply, whilst some will have some rice harvests during these months. In the districts of Baguia, Luro, Laga, Quelicai and Ilionar, it is the worst I have ever seen. People are coming every day to the priest's residence for food relief. I have never seen it like this before. And if you go into their houses, as I do regularly, you can see they have no food. They will tell you themselves.

The people eat a little vegetable gathered from the fields and some cassava root or sago tree if they can find it.

Even if they had money, which they don't, they could not buy food. For example, there is only one shop selling rice in the Baguia market, and it sells at a very high price, much higher than in Baucau, where the price is already Rp 300 a kilo. In the same market, there are no vegetables, except a few leaves, and no meat.

There used to be three rice mills in operation in the Baucau Kabupaten — two in Baucau and one in Laga. Now none are operating because there is not enough rice.

The reports I have received from other priests are that many areas all over the country are suffering food shortages.

It is not that there is no food anywhere. If you travel, you can see isolated rice crops in Laga, Seical, Viqueque, Veneasse, Uatubari, Uatucarabau, Manatutu, Laleia, Maliane, Lois, Luro and Ilomar. And the Red Cross is involved in some distribution. But there are critical shortages. And the worst months of November and December are yet to come.

There are several reasons for the shortages.

Often the people can't get to their fields or the forests either to plant food or to gather it. In the Baguia district there are eight villages. Four of these are immobilised so that no-one can come or go without very strict scrutiny. Other villages have been moved or cleared of people and their inhabitants are collected around the city of Baucau.

The people can't get to their fields either because they are too lethargic or sick from malnutrition, or too weak and tired because they are forced to stay up all night keeping guard (against Fretilin) along the main roads or in the villages. If they fall asleep during their watch, they will be punished or gaoled.

For others, their fields are too far away, as they have been moved to the main town centre. Sometimes the crops are planted but they cannot go back to them because they are forced to keep guard, go on forced patrol or do military drill all day. They are also forced to provide "voluntary" assistance in the Indonesian government development projects, roads, buildings, irrigation.

In addition, there are shortages of water-buffalo and other stock to plough the fields and no money to buy the seeds. They are also so scared they are reduced to submission and inaction. They cannot guarantee that if they go to the fields, they will not be accused of associating with Fretilin, who are still active in these parts.

Late in June, two to three platoons of Indonesian troops suffered heavy casulaties in attacks by Fretilin in the Los Palos area.

I speak to people everywhere and they are not happy with integration. This includes the poor village people and many top government officials. The Timorese civilian leaders stand like statues unable to do anything or say anything against what the Indonesian military are doing.

It is the military who organise everything. The government is building houses and roads and schools, but the people cannot feel this is helping them. They do not feel they are consulted as to what should be done for their area.

They are also aware that other ex-Portuguese colonies are free, but what about East Timor?"

language, culture and history and the state ideology of Pancasila, demonstrating, as one American visitor expressed it, that "the basic commitment is to the next generation rather than the present".

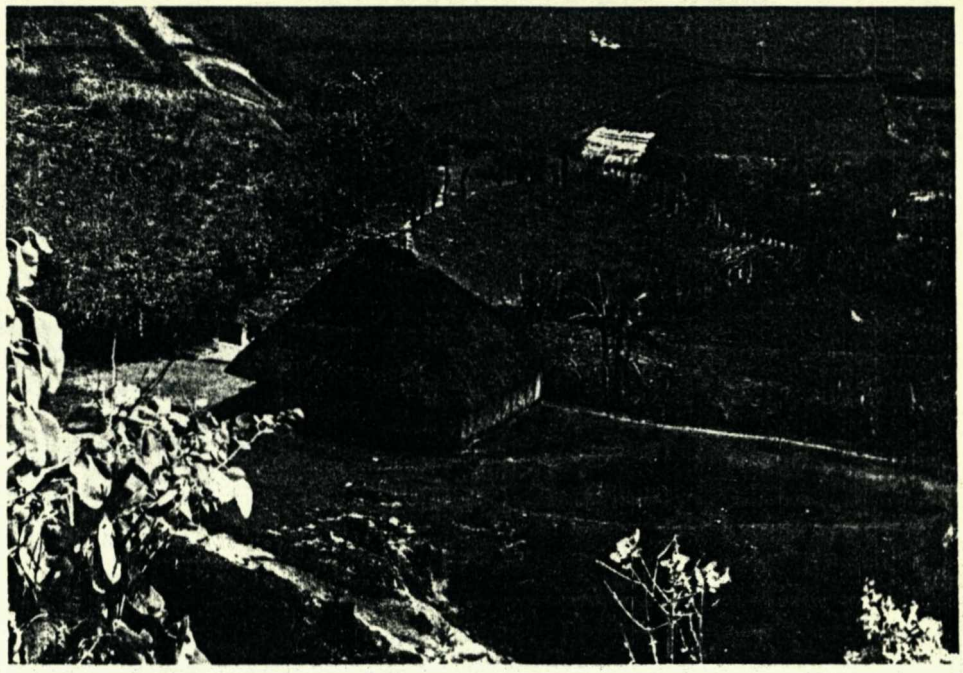
Some 200km of sealed roads have also been constructed enabling easier access to the profitable coffee-growing districts west of Dili and facilitating military access and control away to the East where the resistance is strongest. They are of marginal benefit to tribal Timorese.

Visitors to East Timor who inspect the situation by helicopter invariably remark on the new housing projects whose clearly visible corrugated iron roofs distinguish them from traditional Timorese grass huts.

250 resettlement villages have been constructed to house "most of the people who lived in or near the interior mountains", to cite a recent Australian Department of Foreign Affairs report. Built in neat, straight rows normally along or near a road, these resettlement villages are military in origin and purpose. They are an Indonesian version of the strategic hamlet counter-insurgency programmes employed by the British in Malaya and the US in Vietnam and whose fundamental purpose is to isolate the resistance by removing the people who constitute its base to areas where control is more easily exercised. Traditionally Timorese have lived in scattered extended family groups and in close spiritual affinity with the land with which they have evolved over centuries a finely-balanced economic relationship. The concentration of peoples in resettlement centres away from their land thus represents a radical restructuring of Timorese society. Analogous to the experience of the Australian Aborigines, the psychological and cultural impact on the Timorese has been shattering.

The resettlement on the island of Atauro of some 4,700 people mainly from the eastern districts of East Timor exemplifies the policy in its grossest form. The report prepared by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, September 1982, observes, "Atauro is an integral part of the strategy being followed by the Indonesian authorities in an attempt to rid the province of remaining FRETILIN, i.e. to remove FRETILIN's possible base of support. Any family thought to have a relative 'in the mountains' is sent to Atauro".

Accommodation is in hot and cramped iron-roofed barracks divided inside by sheets of black plastic. The detainees depend entirely on the Red Cross for food supplies. Mario Carrascalao, the Timorese



Governor of East Timor, told journalists in March 1983 that, while he agreed with the use of Atauro for military purposes, he thought that it did not meet its "humanitarian" goals because "it leaves a mark on all who pass through it, including children". 700 people have recently been re-resettled from Atauro, not to their home villages in the east, but to an area near Maliana in the west whose language they do not speak and where, it is said, there is nothing for them.

The wholesale movement of people which has become such a feature of Indonesia's administration of East Timor also extends to the resettlement in Timor of Indonesians. East Timor has been officially designated a transmigration centre. 100 farmers from Bali have been settled side by side with Timorese on a wet rice project near Maliana. A further 500 'model farmers' are being sought from Medan, Bali and Sulawesi.

Food Shortages

Indonesian agricultural initiatives notwithstanding, food continues to be a major problem in East Timor. Though there is no famine as such at present, and some areas are adequately supplied, the overall situation is far from secure.

Shortages persist in many areas and many thousands of Timorese depend on regular handouts from agencies. "Without that distribution", concluded the Australian Foreign Affairs report, "many people would undoubtedly suffer". The report adds that because essentially only corn is being distributed, the distribution "does **not** necessarily prevent malnutrition . . . and does **not** mean that people have an ideal food intake".

The legacy of Portuguese neglect and climatic vagaries are partly responsible for the food crisis. However, there is general agreement among the Timorese that the persistent shortages are a new phenomenon mainly traceable to the consequences of the invasion (male deaths, the destruction of livestock, and so on), on-going military activities (involving the conscription of the labour force, restrictions on movement, exhaustion) and administrative measures — particularly the policy of mass resettlement of people away from their lands.

An analogous situation exists in regard to health. Major health problems are said to be malnutrition, gastroenteritis, skin-disorders, malaria, and infections of the respiratory system, including TB. Government initiatives to train medical personnel are underway but overall health facilities are sparse and medicines are in short supply.

Attitudes of the Timorese

Timorese antipathy towards Indonesia runs deep. The story is told how in Portuguese times a Timorese road gang was blinded by dust thrown up by a passing vehicle. "Never mind", their supervisor said in mock-consolation, "when the Indonesians come they will seal all the roads with bitumen". To which an elderly Timorese responded sharply, "Even if they pave the roads with gold we will never accept Indonesian rule." The small following commanded by the pro-Indonesian APODETI party in 1975 bears this out.

The invasion and its repressive aftermath have hardened antipathy into deep-seated bitterness leaving an indelible scar on the Timorese psyche.

The New Zealand journalist, Martyn Bates, who visited East Timor in March this year, concluded that the majority of East Timorese were engaged in what he termed "cold war" with their Indonesian masters. Both he and Portuguese journalists who visited at the same time were struck by the heavy atmosphere of fear pervading Timor. "Most of the people are afraid . . . most of them keep silent", the then head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Mgr. Lopes, told Bates. Why this should be so is clear from a grim catalogue of abuses contained in a letter written on May 13, 1983 to the Pope by a group of Timorese priests. The Timorese people, they told the Pope, have suffered "moral and physical violence; arbitrary imprisonment; the resettlement of families and whole villages; the execution of those who surrender; executions without trial or after summary judgement; disappearances and the destruction of families; the execution of whole groups of those captured; hunger and disease throughout all of East Timor".

Timorese alienation is also reflected in the large numbers who have sought to leave East Timor for Portugal, Taiwan and Australia, where some have family members who were evacuated during the 1975 civil war. Indonesia has been as reluctant to let people out as it has been to allow visitors in and most of the relatively small number who have succeeded in leaving have been subjected to long delays and the payment of heavy bribes. Some 800 Timorese, now in Portugal, some of whom have been living in refugee camps there since 1976, are anxious to enter Australia but are impeded in their efforts because they are not officially regarded as refugees.

Timorese are also gripped by a strong sense of their own powerlessness. A facade of administrative structures staffed by Timorese has been erected. Timorese representatives sit in the Indonesian parliament; Timorese voted in the last general elections; a Timorese civilian government is in place. Real power, however, rests with the Indonesian army and opportunities for participation and self-determination in the cultural, economic and political spheres do not exist in any genuine sense. "We are only messenger boys", lamented a Timorese last August. "We are ordered to go here and do that, to prepare for this official, to gather and dance for this foreign visitor's arrival, to prepare for a feast, to go and find toak for drinking, or meat . . . just messenger boys going everywhere to do what they are ordered to do by the army."

The experience under Indonesia, however, has had a dynamising impact on the local Church, transforming it into a true Church of the people. Over 50% of Timorese now profess themselves Catholic compared with some 30% before the Indonesian takeover. The Church has "shared in its own flesh the tragedy being enacted in East Timor", to use the words of some Timorese priests in a recent letter, and this experience has led it to address the situation increasingly in terms of human rights and justice. 'Building justice in response to oppression' is the basic theme of the statement released by Timorese religious in 1981. In accordance with this shift in their perceptions of their responsibilities, Church people are emphasising the need for international solidarity with their struggle for justice in addition to the supply of aid.

Mgr. Lopes' strong advocacy of human rights earned him wide respect and his premature resignation as Apostolic Administrator, in May 1983, after intense pressure by the Indonesian government, was greeted with dismay by both the clergy and the people of East Timor. His young successor, Fr. Carlos Filipe Belo, has a formidable responsibility but already there are signs he will be responsive first to the needs and aspirations of his people.

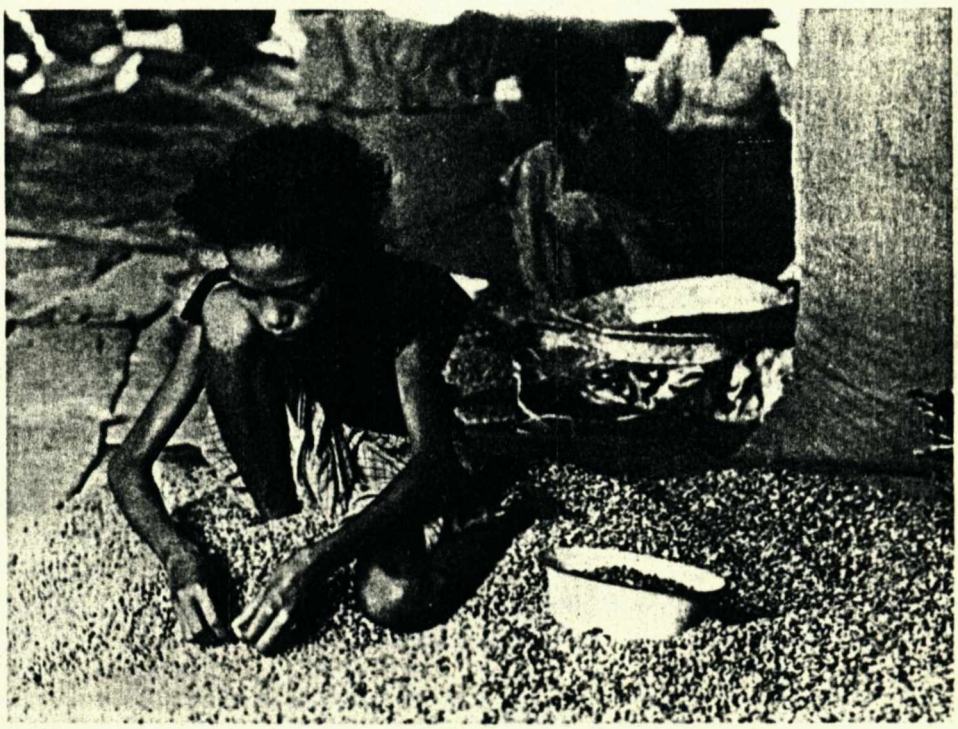
The UN and Self-Determination

The international debate in the UN on self-determination for East Timor has become increasingly desperate in 1983.

Attitudes fall into four broad categories.

A large group simply avoids the question. For governments this principally involves abstaining from voting on annual UN resolutions favouring self-determination for East Timor, thereby virtually leaving the resolution of the issue at this level to those governments which have committed themselves either way. Fifty countries, including the UK, Belgium, Sri Lanka and France, abstained at the last UN session in November 1982.

The second category embraces those who acknowledge that no genuine act of self-determination has taken place in East Timor but who, for political purposes, accord the principle no absolute value and extend an over-riding priority to considerations of national self-interest and the maintenance of good relations with the Suharto regime. The USA is the most prominent proponent of this position. The Reagan administration's new



Ambassador to Indonesia, John Holdridge, informed a Congressional Hearing in September 1982, for example, that US policy was to "accept the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia without recognising that a valid act of self-determination had taken place there." He went on to point out that the US had "other important elements" to consider in its relations with Indonesia including the country's strategic importance in South East Asia and its future as an oil-producer and US trading partner. 46 countries voted against self-determination at the UN last year.

Although unequivocal support for self-determination for East Timor is Labour Party policy, the new Australian government is yet to declare how it will vote at the UN this year. However, there can be little remaining doubt it fundamentally supports the US position, though feeling within the party and public opinion may ultimately compel it at least to abstain on the question.

Category three comprises Indonesia itself which maintains that the East Timorese conducted a valid act of self-determination in 1976. It further maintains that its invasion in 1975 was carried out at the invitation of the Timorese to facilitate this act and that Timorese participation in the Indonesian general elections of 1982 demonstrated a contemporary popular endorsement of the earlier decision. None of these arguments squares with the now well-documented record. The deaths of over 100,000 Timorese and the broad and prolonged resistance to Indonesia's military intervention cannot be reconciled with claims of a popularly supported liberation exercise. Further the very claims themselves — that virtually 100% of registered Timorese voted for Golkar (the Suharto Party) in the 1982 elections — reveal the emptiness of this election as a democratic exercise conducted, as it was, under military control and in the absence of a broad representation of foreign observers.

The final category is the self-determination lobby. Fifty countries supported self-determination for East Timor at last year's UN General Assembly, led by Portugal, its former African colonies and newly independent states such as Zimbabwe and Vanuatu. Portugal, which broke off diplomatic relations with Indonesia after the invasion in 1975, is still regarded by the UN as the administering authority of East Timor and bound by its newly reshaped Constitution "to promote and safeguard" the right to self-determination and independence of its former colony. It remains to be seen, however, whether the new Portuguese government under Mario Soares, will follow the lead set by the previous conservative administration and provide the international leadership which is so urgently needed on this issue.

Two basic considerations underlie the self-determination position. The first is the principle that the right and aspiration of the East Timorese people to self-determination is non-negotiable and must be upheld. This right is fundamental to human development and cannot be considered to have been forfeited by the East Timorese people because of the passage of time, the weight of the Indonesian presence or material changes in the situation.

Second, the Indonesian invasion of East Timor contravenes the UN Charter and international law. To accept what has happened would, in general terms, be to subvert the authority of the UN and respect for international law. To condone this particular exercise of might-is-right would equally allow Indonesia, for argument's sake, to annex with impunity Papua New Guinea or the State of East Malaysia (which, like East Timor, also lie within her geographical orbit and have some cultural, historical and racial affinity with one or other of Indonesia's ethnic peoples) were they perceived to pose some real or imagined threat.

Protagonists of the self-determination position take a long-term view based on an openness to history which, it is argued, should not be pre-empted by precipitate political decisions. The issue should therefore be kept on the UN agenda and abstaining countries in particular should be urged to reconsider their position and commit themselves in support of the East Timorese. Keeping the issue on the UN agenda will ensure the possibility of international diplomatic activity towards a genuine act of self-determination. It will also ensure the international scrutiny and pressure which is so vital to the well-being of the Timorese people. Failure to support the UN will effectively aid Indonesian strategy against the Timorese and, in the absence of normalised access, expose them to further abuse.

This article was especially written for the APHD Newsletter by Pat Walsh, consultant on East Timor to the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, the co-ordinating body for 52 non-government agencies working in the field of overseas aid and development.

General Assembly Voting 1982

YES — Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Byelorussia, Cape Verde, China, Congo, Cuba, Cyprus, Dem. Yemen, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kenya, Laos, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Portugal, Rwanda, Sao Tome/Principe, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Trinidad/Tobago, Uganda, Ukrain, USSR, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

NO —Antigua/Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Canada, Chad, Chile, Egypt, El Salvador, Fiji, Gambia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kampuchea, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Maldives, Morocco, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Qatar, St Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Is, Sudan, Suriname, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United States, Uruguay, Yemen.

ABSTAIN — Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Burma, Cameroons, Cent. African Rep., Columbia, Costa Rica, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominica, Dominican Rep., Ecuador, Finland, France, Gabon, German Fed. Rep., Guinea, Haiti, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mauritania, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Peru, Poland, Romania, Samoa, Senegal, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Kingdom, Upper Volta, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, Zaire.

ABSENT — Bulgaria, Comoros, Djibouti, Equat. Guinea, German Dem. Rep., Iran, Libya, Malta, Mongolia, St. Vincent/Grenadines, South Africa.

Interview with a civilian East Timor, May 1982

"In the small towns the situation is quiet, but in the countryside it is not. All along the roads, even in the most isolated areas, you can see people forced to stand guard. Even old, hungry and sick men are involved. They have to build themselves a makeshift shelter and find food and clothing from their own homes which are sometimes very far away. They have to stand guard for a week at a time, twenty four hours a day. They are expected to give a warning if Fretilin are spotted. In fact if Fretilin pass one of these guard posts they are never afraid because they know these guards will consider them as friends.

It's hard to determine how many people are still part of the resistance forces but from the letters they send they still have a strong spirit of resistance. Occasionally Fretilin attack in large numbers. In March 1982, between Manatutu and Lacluta, Fretilin attacked and their numbers were estimated at about 200, including some women. In Suai, at the end of June this year, there was a Fretilin attack at the Motatafara River and from the whole Indonesian battalion only the commander returned home. When I went through the area a few weeks later I was told I had to go back and go via Maliana.

There are occasional letters and statements from the resistance fighters asking the people to stay united, but the difficulty is that the Indonesian intelligence agents are everywhere. People are caught, interrogated and even tortured.

I have spoken to people who have been released. I am told the military use many types of torture including electric shock, taking out finger nails, hanging from the hands, putting their hands and feet under the legs of the table while others jump on the table. These things happened to people I met in 1978 to 1982. I don't know definitely whether they still go on but I know for sure that those in political prisons are certainly subject to such treatment.

Atauro is still a political prison and I am told by a friend who went there on an official visit recently that conditions are very bad. The military tries to convince them that they are better off living on this isolated island than going back to their own village. At the time of the indoctrination program for traditional Timorese leaders, after Whitlam left East Timor, they were told the Government's plan was to completely wipe out Fretilin. Among other things the Indonesians were moving all Fretilin relatives still in the villages to Atauro island. In the months of April, June, July 1982 the flow of people — old people, women and children, continued. They were taken to Laga in trucks and then to Atauro by ship. There are also prisons at Atabai and Aileu.

The priests are almost all disliked by the Indonesians. According to the Indonesians they refuse to cooperate in the redevelopment of the nation. They don't want to look to the future — only to the past. But according to the Timorese it is because the priests want to be faithful to the people.

The people have not had a real chance to decide for themselves and the priests want to walk with the people. As long as the people have not been given the chance to choose freely and responsibly they will not support integration, because it is not the will of the people. The Church personnel/leaders believe that the people must be united again and given the chance to voice their opinion."

APHD at work

"Church people in East Timor are emphasising the need for international solidarity with their struggle for justice in addition to the supply of aid", states the author of the previous article. APHD's response is in line with this perception — through its own contribution to publicising information about the situation in East Timor, through its support of other Church and development agencies involved in educational campaigns on the East Timor issue, and through financial assistance to the programmes of the Church in East Timor.

The Church in East Timor is involved in a wide range of programmes in response to the pressing needs of the people. Among these are programmes to assist widows and orphans — currently the Church is caring for some 13,000 orphans in East Timor; the provision of food, medicine and educational facilities; housing for those forced into towns; health education and small financial assistance for socio-economic projects. The urgent needs of the people who have turned to the Church for assistance in great numbers accentuates the vital importance of the Church's work and APHD's continuing support.

The need for "international scrutiny and pressure which is so vital to the well-being of the Timorese people" advocated by the previous author is a view shared by the APHD. The military situation and the climate of fear in East Timor make it especially difficult to ascertain facts. Three or four day visits by foreign politicians and press, however well-intentioned, are necessarily superficial, and there is clearly a need for an independent and fully resourced investigative mission. Such a mission would help to establish the basic facts of the situation and the views of the East Timorese in respect of those facts.

With this in mind, the APHD agreed to give financial assistance to a ten-day visit to East Timor in July 1983 of a broad-based team of people under the auspices of the UK-based Catholic Institute for International Relations. The team included a number of specialists, such as a doctor of tropical medicines and an agriculturalist, as well as a linguist specialising in East Timorese languages. This visit had originally been proposed by the Indonesian Embassy in London in April 1982. Only days before the visit was due to take place, the Indonesian Embassy cancelled its promised visas on the grounds of 'lack of time'. Such action does little to enhance international understanding of the situation and underscores the need for the East Timor issue to remain firmly on the UN agenda.

APHD in a Nutshell

- APHD is a partnership for the development of people so they may take responsibility for all aspects of their lives.
- This partnership is predicted upon the equality of people and organisations in Asia and in the First World, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a new world founded on religious and human values, and supported by the spiritual and moral force of religions.

The strategy of partnership is organisation, conscientisation and participation of the poor and oppressed in their struggle for self-determination and includes the need to change attitudes in the First World to bring about more just structures of e.g. trade, investment and migration.

The APHD includes Catholic development agencies from:

Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, England, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and the Office for Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

APHD Secretariat: 4th Floor, 154 Elizabeth Steet, Sydney NSW 2000, Australia. Cables: Aspar, Sydney.
Telex: PANATAA 26669 APHD. Tel.: (02) 267 9533.